



State of Connecticut
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony from State Representative Karen Jarmoc (D-Enfield)

IN SUPPORT OF HB 5404
AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISCLOSURE OF EMPLOYEE FILES TO INMATES

Good morning. Representative Spallone and Senator Slossberg and members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee. I come before you today to speak in favor of HB 5404, AN ACT PROHIBITING THE DISCLOSURE OF EMPLOYEE FILES TO INMATES. This measure would prohibit the disclosure of personnel, medical and similar files concerning current or former employees of the Department of Correction or the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to inmates and other persons in the custody of, or under the supervision of, the Commissioner of Correction or confined in a facility of the Whiting Forensic Division.

As the former chairperson of the legislature's Task Force on Correctional Staff Health and Safety and as a lawmaker with prisons in my district, I would like to speak specifically today in regard to why this bill is important for the safety of correctional employees and their families.

Using the Freedom of Information Act, inmates may currently request correctional employee files, whereby they are able to learn the home addresses and disciplinary records of these state Department of Correction employees. Connecticut law allows them to access the information unless the department can prove that the request would threaten the correctional employee's security.

Correctional staff, and in particular, correctional officers, have a unique role and relationship in regard to their supervision of inmates. As many of you know, these officers come in contact with the same inmates on an almost daily basis while performing the difficult duties of their job. If an inmate were able to obtain personal information about an officer and his or her family, not only would this be inappropriate but also potentially dangerous. Inmates would clearly have an opportunity to threaten and intimidate the correctional staff, charged with authority over that individual, with knowledge of personal or job related information. I truly cannot think of any compelling reason why an inmate would have the right to the personnel file of a correctional employee. Yet, more and more inmates are utilizing this opportunity to threaten officers and manipulate the system.

It has been said that on the inside of a correctional facility, information translates to power. The power to do their job in an effective way, without the concern that an inmate may work to endanger their lives or their family, should belong to the correctional staff. It is my understanding that there have been approximately a half dozen complaints by inmates – requesting an officer's personnel file – which have resulted in an actual hearing before the Freedom of Information Commission. To me, this is a half dozen too many.